

advocacy for veterans — but it does that advocacy quietly.

“We don’t stand on Parliament Hill and hoot and holler,” he explained. “I think you have to be on the inside.”

Eagles acknowledged that the Legion, along with some other veterans groups and political parties, supported the New Veterans Charter. But it did so with the idea the document could be changed, which is what the Legion is now working on, he added.

Eagles also admitted that in isolated incidents, some Afghan veterans have not been welcomed at some Legion halls, but at others they are full members. In addition, the Legion is trying to attract more modern veterans, he noted.

Eagles acknowledges that the protests and social media campaigns of the other veterans’ organizations have put the issue of the treatment of former soldiers back on both the public and political agenda.

But the Conservatives have more than just the veterans advocacy groups to contend with.

Modern veterans have not been shy on speaking out publicly. Wounded Afghan veterans booted from the military with few benefits have taken their cases directly to the news media.

Protests have sprung up in a number of cities over the government’s decision to shut down the nine Veterans Affairs offices.

Others have taken the legal route. In 2007, a class-action lawsuit was launched on behalf of injured soldier Dennis Manuge and 4,500 veterans, alleging the government had illegally clawed back their benefits. The veterans won the legal battle and the government will have to pay up to \$800 million.

In 2012, a group of disabled Afghan veterans filed a lawsuit against the government, arguing the New Veterans Charter is unconstitutional. The lawsuit further stoked the flames of discontent when government lawyers argued that Canada does not have a “social contract” to take care of its veterans. (For decades, veterans had assumed that Canada had the legal and social responsibility to take care of its former soldiers.)

Former veterans ombudsman Pat Stogran said the widespread discontent among veterans makes it difficult for the Conservatives to portray the issue as one caused by a few dissidents.

“It’s not just a small group of veterans advocates,” said Stogran, a retired colonel and Afghan veteran. “There is real anger out there but the Conservatives seem to think they can solve the issue with their public relations spin. It’s not going to work.”

dpugliese@ottawacitizen.com

Twitter.com/davidpugliese

■ VETERANS GROUPS TAKE AIM AT
MINISTER, PAGE A8

SOME VETERANS GROUPS

- Royal Canadian Legion
- Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans (ANAVETs) in Canada
- National Council of Veterans Associations (this group is an umbrella organization of some 60 distinct veterans associations, including the Dieppe Veterans and Prisoners of War Association and the War Amps)
- Veterans of Canada
- Veteranvoice.info
- Canadian Veterans Advocacy
- Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping
- Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association
- NATO Veterans Organization of Canada